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Scandinavian Society of Forest Economics  
2014

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Hyytiä , A 2014 , Sustainable development international framework  
analysis in the context of forests and forest products with a stakehold  
review . in Scandinavian Forest Economics . vol. 45 , Scandinavian Forest Economics ,  
Scandinavian Society of Forest Economics , pp. 1-7 , Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of  
the Scandinavian Society of Forest Economics , Uppsala , Sweden , 22/05/2014 .

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/328579>

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# **Sustainable development – international framework – overview and analysis in the context of forests and forest products with a stakeholder view – a literature review**

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## **Abstract**

Co-operation between different stakeholder groups is found important. Private owners have an important position and privately owned forests form a remarkable resource for forestry in Finland. Sustainable development is followed by several international organizations: for example the United Nations and the OECD with green strategies. Features of sustainable development may be found in the green concepts. Forests and forest products are presented with sustainable development characteristics in many national and international associations, linking to diverse ecosystems, in various programmes, standards and certification schemes. In the value chain from forests, forest certification is a market-based tool. The Corporate Social Responsibility strengthens corporate's profitability. Forests and forest products with sustainable development characteristics are represented internationally by organizations, in the national and international regulation as the EU regulation and in corporations with the customer social responsibility aspect.

The research method of this study is a qualitative study and a literature review.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, stakeholders, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), forests and forest products, certification, green business

## 1 Introduction

This study is based on articles from relevant databases which include for example Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Agris, CAB Abstracts, SCOPUS (Elsevier) and Web of Science (ISI). Also Internet sites, Google Scholar and literature of the relevant fields like international and country specific policy and regulation have been used to compose the review. The study is a descriptive review. It is not strictly but broadly outlined. It is a qualitative study. It combines organizational information and research information. The focus has been on sustainable development in the field of forest related international framework in the context of forests and forest products. Greenness in business and organizations is an actual theme in the sustainable development area <sup>i</sup>.

## 2 Theoretical background

The stakeholder approach is nowadays a common way of treating issues concerned with broader social responsibilities in business <sup>ii</sup>. The stakeholder theory includes an assumption of values in the business. It concerns the responsibility from management to stakeholders. <sup>iii</sup> The CSR discourse relates to stakeholder theory with organizations relating to their stakeholders <sup>iv</sup>. The stakeholder theory is seen as a useful tool for evaluating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) <sup>v</sup>.

The CSR in the European Commission documentation refers to business operations of companies as well as to their interaction with their stakeholders <sup>vi</sup>. The concepts of corporate responsibility started to develop already in the 1950s. In the past decades, global corporate responsibility issues have emerged rapidly <sup>vii</sup>. Global infrastructure is needed for understanding the actual forest economics development in the sustainability development sphere taking into consideration the use of forest resources and processing of forest products. <sup>viii ix</sup> Various stakeholders may create value for a company and a

company may have a role in the value creation as well as playing also a role as an actor in the society.<sup>x</sup>

The corporate responsibility approach has provided an international sphere where different actors as businesses, business associations, governments, trade unions, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may discuss the variety of standards of business conduct and management practice. The OECD states that the mutual influence among these actors has been significant.<sup>xi</sup> State and civil society actors and market actors belong to stakeholders of a corporation<sup>xii</sup>. Moreover, owners and shareholders belong to stakeholders of an enterprise<sup>xiii</sup>. A broad set of stakeholders may include suppliers, employees, regulators and the local community<sup>xiv</sup>.

The value chain perspective offers a tool for a market-based approach in the forest sector<sup>xv xvi</sup>. Value chain concept was initiated by Michael Porter in “Competitive Strategy” in 1980<sup>xvii</sup>. Companies can create value in their business by investing in new technology and new products.<sup>xviii</sup> A value chain of a corporation may be enhanced with the globalization.<sup>xix</sup> In Finland, the value chain approach has an extensive characteristic in an international context<sup>xx</sup> and the value chain of Finnish forest industry has a large importance economically<sup>xxi</sup>.

### **3 Corporations in a Corporate Social Responsibility approach**

The Corporate Social Responsibility offers significant benefits for business. Benefits include maintaining competitiveness by meeting stakeholder expectations and standards. According to the research findings, the corporate responsibility may be developed as a source of competitive advantage for forest-based companies.<sup>xxii</sup>

Forest industry development is facing new challenges and opportunities<sup>xxiii</sup>. Companies improving environmental performance through industrial ecology are able to do environmentally responsible promoting which may create new marketing opportunities<sup>xxiv</sup>. Green business and green initiatives may be targeted for example with forest certification, in addition to bioeconomy solutions and wood-based construction<sup>xxv</sup>.

Within the research on green practices in the wood industries and the business in the green supply chains for wood products, the wood product supply chain

focus provides a view point from the actors like forest owners, industry and market communication. Within the discussion of environmental aspects, the forest industry has a key position. Stakeholders and their insights in the forest industry supply chain have an important position, also for the research and future policies.<sup>xxvi</sup> Credibility in the collaboration with stakeholders is important<sup>xxvii</sup>. International forest sector governance is a timely issue in international bilateral and multilateral relations<sup>xxviii</sup>.

According to the results of the research “Environmental Marketing Strategy and its Implementation in Forest Industries” by Jari Kärnä in 2003, most of the surveyed companies emphasize environmental issues in their values, marketing strategy and implementation.<sup>xxix</sup>

Results of a Nordic research focusing on business-to-business relations in the Nordic wood industry show that in the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian wood products value-chains, the most commonly used and important environmental performance measures (EPMs) are forest certificates. Environmental performance measures were considered very important for entering or to maintain markets by the managers, especially in exports and business-to-business-markets. The sustainable origin of wood and the ability to document the company operations’ were the two most important characteristics of environmental performance measures of wood-products value chain in three Nordic countries in this study. According to these Nordic research results customer requirements are the main drivers for the use of environmental performance measures.<sup>xxx</sup>

According to the Nordic study forest certification has become an essential requirement in the key markets. The study combines stakeholder perceptions. Key stakeholders of the same research are customers, suppliers and environmental authorities.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Certified products can contribute to market success. Also, the ISO 26 000 standard provides guidance on the Corporate Social Responsibility.<sup>xxxii</sup> The ISO collaborates closely with the private and public sectors, national organizations, the European Community and other international entities.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Certification processes help companies to gain access to the investment and consumer markets and to maintain a competitive position. Certification procedures can be defined in individual products, individual product quality certification, certification of production processes, and certification of management systems.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Quality of the wood products has a close relationship to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)<sup>xxxv</sup>. With certification it is possible to implement Corporate Social Responsibility policies<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

Finnish companies focus on three pillars of the Corporate Social Responsibility: economic, social and environmental responsibilities<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Overall, sustainable development orientation is seen preferable for corporations. Market orientation and stakeholder orientation are also presented as strategies of corporate responsibility in the sustainable development. The question is about strategies and sustainable development orientation, cooperation, market orientation and responsibilities.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

According to a Corporate Social Responsibility research, proactivity can be suggested. The proactive contribution of a firm has been found to have a positive impact on the Corporate Social Responsibility. Active engagement in the Corporate Social Responsibility and managing close relationships with the key stakeholder groups, including governments, communities and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) have gained importance in the area of the Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporation's proactive management has positive influence on firm's corporate social performance and there are initiatives to improve the environmental performance.<sup>xxxix</sup> Social and environmental responsibility can be seen as a competitive tool<sup>xl</sup>. Corporate responsibility can enhance value creation for forest-based companies. The Corporate Social Responsibility concept can be seen as a profit for companies.<sup>xli</sup>

## 4 Forest owners in a stakeholder approach

New forest act of Finland gives more choices and opportunities for a forest owner and strives for the sustainability with economic, social and ecological aspects.<sup>xlii</sup>

Finland's non-governmental stakeholders include the private forestland owners, industry, environmental groups, customers, professional forestry establishment and labour<sup>xliii</sup>. In Finland, there is active international forest co-operation with stakeholders<sup>xliv</sup>.

Forest owners form a major group benefiting from income generated in the forest sector.<sup>xlv</sup> The private sector is recognized as a key actor for developing sustainable forest management in the Integrated Programme of Work of Green Economy Action Plan.<sup>xlvi</sup> A research of Finnish forest owners reveals that multi-goal forest owners prevail with 30% dominance. This group entails mainly countryside entrepreneurs, people living in the countryside and people who own large forest areas.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Results of a research “Forest owners’ social networks – possibilities to enhance knowledge exchange“ in which forest owners and their stakeholders with a social emphasis were analyzed show that owners’ social networks were most expanded when making protection agreements or timber trade in a group. It is also typical that forest owners have trusted professionals as stakeholders also in a decision making team.<sup>xlvi</sup>

In a Nordic context, there has been found participatory and marketing effectiveness in the certification schemes.<sup>xlvi</sup> Group certification enhances family forest owners’ participation<sup>1</sup>.

Forest certification in Finland is based on the ministerial conference in Helsinki in 1993 where criteria and indicators for European sustainable forest management were discussed. International aspects and stakeholders have been taken into consideration early on. Policy has had an important role.<sup>li</sup> <sup>lii</sup> In Finland, the FFCS standard (now the PEFC) was developed in 1998.<sup>liii</sup> The PEFC was founded in Paris in 1999<sup>liv</sup>. For its instrumental benefits it is also suggested that forest certification should be at the top of the sustainability agenda.<sup>lv</sup> The PEFC strives for a system suitable for small- and medium-sized family forestry.<sup>lvi</sup> In regards to wood resources, the Finnish Forest Industry has committed to support internationally recognized forest certification which is applicable to the national environment and conditions, and to do co-operation with the stakeholders.<sup>lvii</sup>

## **5 International approaches with responsible private sector engagement and trade**

International initiatives in the organizations of the United Nations and the European Union have a remarkable significance on the development of national forest programmes, the forest act, the forest cluster and the competitiveness of Finland<sup>lviii</sup>. EU policy-making has significance with regard to national forest policy networks on the one hand because several EU policies affect the forest sector either directly or indirectly.<sup>lix</sup>

EU is a significant player on the global timber market. There are two main pillars of FLEGT: a legality assurance system and the governance reform in timber producing countries. The concept of illegal logging is multidimensional.<sup>lx</sup> The European Union with the due diligence regulation and the US with the Lacey Act Amendment guide the imports. Legal wood supports national forest sectors.<sup>lxi</sup> In the European Union, Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan concerning markets, trade,

economic development and the relation between different instruments and conventions nationally and internationally offers amongst others possibilities for collaboration.<sup>lxii</sup> The regions and countries which altogether contain nearly 60% of the world's forests supplying a large proportion of internationally traded timber include Central Africa, Russia, Tropical South America and Southeast Asia<sup>lxiii</sup>. International processes are the key to the development of a global forest sector.<sup>lxiv</sup> International stakeholder approach in the sustainable development is a goal in the Forest Europe Process.<sup>lxv</sup> Stakeholder collaboration is present also in the Green Economy approach<sup>lxvi</sup>. New markets are expected. International processes and agreements have an important position. Technological development is expected to increase the export of forest products.<sup>lxvii</sup>

FLEGT has a position in the global forest regime in the national implementation<sup>lxviii</sup>. Legality verification has a significant potential for reinforcing both global private certification and domestic governance<sup>lxix</sup>. Forest certification has been counted to have a major contribution as to FLEGT internationally<sup>lxx</sup>.

Timber procurement policies are introduced in response to public concerns in consumer countries about the environmental impacts<sup>lxxi</sup>. Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan is to create more responsible wood product framework in Europe to avoid importing of illegal roundwood. Developing stronger product and corporate brands to strengthen corporate environmental and social sustainability is suggested.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Fostering sustainable forest management certification globally is found important<sup>lxxiii</sup>. Imported wood is estimated to be an important raw material source also in the future<sup>lxxiv</sup>. Documents in the area of sustainable development in the forest sector in the European Union include the document Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market. In the following are listed countries with biggest value altogether in euros of the import in 2006–2010 according to the mentioned timber and timber product items outside the EU:

Russia 2 911 290 509 €  
 China 100 671 604 €  
 Uruguay 95 055 526 €  
 Brazil 73 181 098 €  
 Canada 60 410 991 €  
 Belarus 54 162 238 €  
 USA 49 345 757 €  
 Norway 41 606 335 € and



Malesia 31 153 218 €<sup>lxxv</sup>

According to the regulation, an operator means a natural or legal person placing timber or timber products on the market. Organizations of operators interact with a diverse range of stakeholders. According to the regulation the traceability of timber and timber products is highlighted in the supply chain.

According to the UNECE, by May 2012, 51% of the certified forest area was in North America, 25% in the EU/EFTA region and 12% in other Europe and the CIS and 13% across the southern hemisphere<sup>lxxvi</sup>. World's forest product markets have become increasingly interrelated<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

## 6 Stakeholder collaboration in a policy framework

Cubbage et al. discuss natural resource policy tools in “Policy instruments to enhance multi-functional forest management” and state that policy tools must adapt to achieve the goals of multi-functional forestry goals taking also into consideration the stakeholder groups, a broad range of ownerships and values<sup>lxxviii</sup>.

Collaboration between stakeholders is found important.<sup>lxxix</sup> Stakeholder collaboration is present in the Finland's National Forest Programme<sup>lxxx lxxxi</sup>. Finland has also been actively collaborating in international forest arrangements.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The importance of intergovernmental ministerial agreements have been recognized as remarkable developments<sup>lxxxiii</sup>, for example the ministerial forest conference in Helsinki in 1993<sup>lxxxiv</sup>. Forest programs have an increasing importance in linking the inter-sectoral collaboration.<sup>lxxxv</sup> The promotion of sustainable exploitation of natural resources is based in the National Natural Resource Strategy<sup>lxxxvi</sup>. Objectives in strengthening sustainable economic growth and competitiveness are included in the Programme of the Finnish Government.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Strategies in the forest policy have a link to new forest sector products including new technology, constructing, bio-based economy and new future of the forest sector. Opportunities for forestry and the forest industry and the related industries as well as the role of green investments have been emphasized in green and bio-based economy.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The vision for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy includes giving the ground for sustainable production and consumption of forest products in the Policy Development and

monitoring of the forest sector in relation to a green economy.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Conservation of natural capital and efficient use of resources belong to the areas of Green Economy<sup>xc</sup>. Sustainable production and consumption of forest products includes for example certification of sustainable forest management and related labelling as well as other standards for sustainable forest management.<sup>xcj</sup> The OECD recommends in greening the growth to improve the economy, protect the environment, and reduce global inequality<sup>xcii</sup>.

In the Nordic region, the Green Growth is one of the main incentives in the sustainable development collaboration<sup>xciii</sup>. The Nordic “Green Growth” includes bioeconomy initiatives and energy questions<sup>xciv</sup>. Nordic partnership between Finland and Sweden is enhancing Green Economy solutions: there is worldwide demand for services and products.<sup>xcv</sup> Possible strategic responses to driving forces affecting the forest industry include economic growth and globalization<sup>xcvi</sup>. European trade policy which is a core component of the EU’s 2020 strategy aims to increase the EU’s competitiveness: it includes sustainable growth and a contribution to the Green Growth in the EU and worldwide<sup>xcvii</sup>.

The new European Union Forest Strategy includes objectives which include ensuring and demonstrating that all forests in the EU are managed using the sustainable forest management principles. The aim is also to reduce deforestation, to foster competitiveness and sustainability of the EU’s forest-based industries and to ensure the protection of the forests.<sup>xcviii</sup>

## 7 Discussion and conclusions

Diverse international sustainable development concerns both forest and forest products and strives for ecological, social and economic sustainability. Forest policy strategies have a link to new forest sector products including new technology, constructing, bio-based economy and new future of the forest sector. Opportunities and the role of forest industry and related industries as well as the role of green investments have nowadays been emphasized in green businesses. Sustainable development approaches seem increasingly interrelated taking account the main driving forces affecting the forest sector. Responsibility can be maintained from the forest owner till the corporation for example by forest certification. The Corporate Social Responsibility has a link to environmentally sustainable green initiatives and concepts. Multi-stakeholder aspects are common and are found important and have also

international perspectives. Green business in organizations is an actual theme in the sustainable development area. It has many new solutions for the future.

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